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Sir Syed Ahmad Khan

Muslim Renaissance Man of India

A Bicentenary Commemorative Volume

Edited by
A.R. KIDWAI



Sir Syed Ahmad Khan

Muslim Renaissance Man of India

A Bicentenary Commemorative Volume

This commemorative volume, marking the bicentenary of an outstanding thinker, writer, educationist, and visionary – Sir Syed Ahmad Khan (1817-1898) – brings into sharper light the various facets of Sir Syed's genius. Contributors to the volume, hailing from the US, Europe, and South Asia, provide fresh perspectives on Sir Syed's oeuvre, and his sterling contributions to domains as diverse as the Quran interpretation, Prophet Muhammad's biography, social reform, Urdu language and literature, journalism, travelogue, archaeology, history, politics, inter-faith understanding, and, above all, education.



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A Bicentenary Commemorative Volume

Editor
A.R. Kidwai



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Perspectives on Sir Syed and the Aligarh Movement

M. Mohibul Haque

"The philosophers have only interpreted the world in various ways, the point however, is to change it."

(Karl Marx, Thesis on Feuerbach)

Time influences everyone but there are very few who influence time and change the course of history. Sir Syed was indeed amongst one of the greatest men who shaped and guided the course of historical development in the Indian subcontinent in the 19th century. His indelible footprints are quite visible in all walks of lives of the Muslims of the Indian subcontinent even after over a century of his demise. He was an educationist, a social reformer, a political activist with perspicacious understanding of the situation, a great journalist, a commentator of the religious texts, an epitome of Hindu-Muslim unity, and an intrepid fighter against the forces of conservative outlook, orthodoxy, superstition and intolerance.

He was not an individual but an institution, a movement, a phenomenon and one of the most influential personalities of the 19th century. Great political philosopher, Karl Marx has rightly observed: "The philosophers have only interpreted the world in various ways, the point however, is to change it."¹ In the light of the above statement it is desirable to see that how a humble servant of the British government, through his sincere efforts and sacrifices was able to change the world that destiny and time had unfolded upon him. Sir Syed was endowed with courage, conviction and incisive insight of a statesman who changed the gloomy world he found himself in, by changing the world view of his countrymen and the community he belonged to. In fact, he was the first Muslim who positively responded to the call of western modernity and became the catalyst for transformation of Muslims from declining and suffocating medievalism to rising and liberating modernism. Acknowledging the contribution of Sir Syed, Christian W. Troll in his outstanding work on

Sir Syed remarks that “nobody intent upon understanding the phenomenon of ideological change from so-called medieval to modern Islam in the nineteenth century can afford to ignore the religious thought of the Indian Muslim Sayyid Ahmad Khan (1817–98).”² Noted historian K.A. Nizami pays tributes to the great man in these words:

In the history of India’s transition from medievalism to modernism, Sayyid Ahmad Khan stands out prominently as a dynamic force pitted against conservatism, superstition, inertia and ignorance. He contributed many of the essential elements to the development of modern India and paved the way for the growth of a healthy scientific attitude of mind which is the sine qua non for advancement, both material and intellectual.³

To appreciate the great achievements of Sir Syed we must look into the circumstances under which he tried for and succeeded in bringing a meaningful positive change in the attitude, approach and indeed the path and destination of a community which was destined to be consigned to the dustbin of history. In fact there are uncountable number of people who live a life just on the mercy of their time and circumstances while there are few who try to resist the negativity of circumstances and with their strong will and determination become the harbinger of change and are counted and acknowledged for their great services.

THE REVOLT OF 1857

Great political philosopher Thomas Hobbes reported that “my mother gave birth to twins: myself and fear.”⁴ The indelible impact of the English Civil War on the personality of Hobbes is evident from his writings. Similarly, it was the First War of India’s independence, 1857 and its aftermath which shaped the personality of Sir Syed as a social reformer and political activist. The catastrophe of 1857 brought not only the fall of the mighty Mughal Empire but also the collapse of the centuries old socio-economic and political structure. The defeat of Indian revolutionaries at the hands of the British had completed the process of colonization of a great civilization. A country of continental size with a glorious history of five thousand years was converted into a market for the finished products of London, Manchester and Birmingham. Its indigenous and prosperous industries and sprawling cities were deliberately destroyed through a carefully designed policy of de-industrialization and

de-urbanization. Its cherished values and ideals were made the target of attack from the foreign forces.

The Muslims were the worst victim of the repression that followed the Revolt. The wrath of British fell heavily upon Muslims, as the British authorities blamed them for all the wrongs. Delhi, Awadh and other centers of Muslim glory were destroyed. The Mughal ruler Bahadur Shah Zafar who became the symbol of resistance in Delhi was detained and his two sons were executed in his presence. The ruler himself was deported to Rangoon and thousands of Muslims were massacred without trial. Their properties were confiscated. Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru notes that the wrath of British fell heavily upon Muslims after the failure of the Revolt because the British thought that Muslims “were more aggressive and militant, possessing memories of recent rule in India, and therefore more dangerous.”⁵ The destruction of the Muslims was such that it seemed that the community would never revive in the subcontinent. Pandit Nehru further observes: “After the Mutiny the Indian Muslims had hesitated which way to turn. The British Government had deliberately repressed them to an even greater degree than it had repressed the Hindus, and this repression had especially affected those sections of the Muslims from which the new middle class, the bourgeoisie, might have been drawn. They felt down and out and were intensely anti-British as well as conservative.”⁶ This repression of the Muslims had affected the community in many other ways as well. The decline of Mughal empire and the crumbling feudal economy under pressure from the change in mode of production and consequent production relations had bewildered the community which was totally dependent on feudal economic structure. With the fall of the Mughals and its attendant landlordism the Muslim upper class disappeared and went in oblivion. A new class was rising among Indians which was ready to adopt the Western education and entrepreneurship unleashed by the new forces of production that had emerged and found patronage to support the market-oriented economic structure of the colonial masters. Unfortunately, the middle class was conspicuously missing among the Muslims while there was constant rise of this class in other communities of the country. Pandit Nehru notes this fact and succinctly observes: “...the new middle classes were almost absent among the Muslims. Their avoidance of western education, their keeping away from trade and industry, and their adherence to feudal ways, gave a start to the Hindus which they profited by and retained. British policy was inclined to be pro-Hindu and anti-Muslim, except in the Punjab, where Muslims took more easily to western education than elsewhere. But the Hindus had got a big

start long before the British took possession of the Punjab. Even in the Punjab, though conditions were more equal for the Hindu and Muslim, the Hindus had an economic advantage. Anti-foreign sentiment was shared alike by the Hindu and Muslim aristocracy and the masses. The Revolt of 1857 was a joint affair, but in its suppression Muslims felt strongly, and to some extent rightly, that they were the greater sufferers.”⁷

“The Muslims in the medieval period received highly preferential treatment at the hands of the government in state services; and the grant of *wazifas*, rent-free jagir and lands for their maintenance. The nepotism of the ‘faithful’ made them inert and dependent on the help of the state to such an extent that they found themselves helpless when they were faced with stiff competition under the British rule.”⁸

There were diverse reactions to the new developments among Indians. One of the positive developments was the cultural awakening and socio-religious reform movements among various communities of India. Raja Rammohan Roy became the pioneer of social reforms among Hindus in India and therefore he is regarded as the first modern man of India. He along with other reformers gave emphasis on scientific outlook, rationalism, humanism and modern education. There were others like Dayananda Saraswati who gave a call for going back to Vedas which resulted in revivalist movements.

The reform movements among Muslims were started late. The failed attempt at freedom from the yoke of slavery of the British had shattered the morale of the community. Pessimism, stagnation, decay, and confusion loomed large. As a reaction to the repression the Muslims started hating everything that was British in nature be it the Western education, science and technology or even the manifestations of material progress like typewriters, hand pipes, telegraph etc. The Muslim *Ulama* who had strong grip on the pulse of the Muslim masses were looking for a heavenly solution to worldly challenges. Tara Chand observes about the reaction of the Muslim *Ulama* to British rule in these words: “Their primary object was to purify the religious practices of the people, to remove the accumulation of the superstitions and unIslamic elements from their midst, and to persuade them to lead a life in accord with the injunctions of the *Quran* and the *Hadith*—the teachings and example of the Prophet. More than this, they felt so long as India remained subject to foreign rule, it would not be possible to carry out these reforms. According to them, the politico-religious issue could only be resolved after the removal of British domination, which threatened to destroy Islam politically as well as culturally.”⁹ Tara Chand further observes: “Hatred of alien rule,

which had disposed them of influence in the State, naturally created revulsion in their minds against foreign learning and culture. They realized that English education would shake the Muslims' faith in Islam and turn many into apostates."¹⁰

Rather than dispassionately brooding over the causes of the defeat and annihilation by the British, Muslims were trying to take refuge in the memories of their past glory. Revivalist tendencies waiting for divine intervention were becoming stronger. Since the diagnosis of the problem was wrong, the solutions offered were definitely going to be wrong. Therefore, there was no sign of recovery or revival at all for Muslims. However, the credit goes to Sir Syed for showing the right path to Muslims in times of darkness. After deeply analyzing the predicaments of Muslims he found modern or Western education as the ultimate panacea but it was difficult to persuade or convince Muslims to go for Western education. Thus to develop scientific temper among people he established the *Ghazipur Scientific Society*, published *Aligarh Institute Gazette* and to awake Muslims from deep slumber he started his famous periodical *Tahzib-al-akhlaq* or *The Muhammadan Social Reformer*. Through these periodicals, he introduced a new style of prose writing in Urdu. He is credited with making Urdu capable of articulating the difficult issues and ideas of morality, philosophy, humanities and sciences in simple and understandable language. As a matter of fact he liberated Urdu language from the artificial shackles of deliberately adopted difficult style of prose-writing at that time.

Sir Syed tried to change the attitude of the British government towards Muslims through his writings, speeches and advocacies. He was conscious of the fact that unless the colonial masters are persuaded not to distrust Muslims, it would be difficult for the community to survive and revive. On the other hand, he was also aware that confrontational approach adopted by the Muslims would do much harm to them in future as well. Therefore, he made sincere efforts to build cordial relations between the Muslims and the colonial masters. These efforts included: writing of a memorandum, *Asbab-i-Baghawat-i-Hind* (The Causes of India's Revolt) in 1858, bringing out of *Loyal Mahomedans of India* in 1860, writing commentary on Bible (1862–67), delivering speeches and lectures to Muslim audiences and persuading them to shun the path of confrontation and violence and accept the reality. Since the Revolt of 1857, Sir Syed made it the mission of his life to devote all his time and energy to work for the revival and regeneration of his community.

Sir Syed wanted to make education the vehicle of social transformation among Muslims. But this education was not the one prevailing in the

community for centuries. Sir Syed was bold enough to declare the prevailing system of education as outdated and redundant. In fact he openly opposed the Madrasa education and wanted to replace it with new system of education introduced by the British government. This was not liked by the traditional clergy and it started opposing and denouncing Sir Syed's movement for modern secular education. Facing opposition from the community he repeatedly tried to impress upon his community to accept the new reality and welcome the new system of education. However, to avoid mistrust and confusion about his scheme of education, and to highlight the importance of Humanities and Science with happy blending of religious morality, Sir Syed said: "Philosophy will be in our right hand and natural Science in our left; and the crown of 'There is no god but Allah and Muhammad is His Prophet' will adorn our heads."¹¹ Despite all opposition he was able to remain focused to sustain his movement for socio-economic and cultural regeneration of his community through education.

THE ALIGARH MOVEMENT AND THE ESTABLISHMENT OF M.A.O. COLLEGE

Isiah Berlin in his celebrated biography of Karl Marx observes: "... men have lived too long in a world of intellectual darkness to be able to move unblinkered in the sudden light of day. A process of gradual education in scientific principles is therefore required: the growth of reason and the advance of truth, while in themselves sufficient to conquer the forces of prejudice and ignorance, cannot occur until enlightened men are found ready to devote their whole lives to the task of educating the vast benighted mass of mankind."¹² Sir Syed indeed was one of the few such great men who successfully lifted a big chunk of humanity that was determined to live in the 'world of intellectual darkness' for a long period of time. He started a great movement i.e., the Aligarh Movement for bringing in complete change in the life of a community that was hell-bent upon living in the self-created world of orthodoxy, decadence and decay.

Three important issues provided impetus to Sir Syed to launch the Aligarh movement. These issues were: Relative backwardness of Muslims in comparison to Hindus, the representation of Muslims in the prevailing and emerging power structures after the fall of the Mughals, and threat to the religio-cultural identity of Muslims in the wake of propaganda by Christian missionaries and Hindu revivalists. He launched Aligarh Movement with full vigour, established the Mohammadan Anglo-Oriental College in 1877 which

was transformed into the Aligarh Muslim University in 1920. Gibb calls this university 'the first modernist Islamic institution in the world'.¹³

The Aligarh Movement was an all-comprehensive movement started by Sir Syed Ahmad Khan and his companions in the aftermath of the Revolt of 1857. The movement aimed at regeneration of Muslims who faced the wrath of British government after the Revolt. The aims and objects of the movement were to inculcate scientific temper, critical reasoning, and spirit of large-hearted tolerance among Muslims through Western education. Although there were many dimensions of the movement, its main focus was regeneration of the community through education. Sir Syed not only emphasized the importance of the Western education but also pointed out the fallacy and the futility of the prevailing system of Madrasa education among Muslims. He declared the Madrasa education of that time as outdated and called upon the Muslims to accept the Western sciences and philosophy. Sir Syed wanted to establish MAO College not because there were no institutions for Muslims at that time. In fact, the Muslims had maintained many madrasas in those days. But Sir Syed was not satisfied with those madrasas as he considered them to be outdated. He wrote in *Tahzib-al-akhlaq*: "The Muslims have started in these days a number of institutions of old learning at Jaunpur, Aligarh, Kanpur, Saharanpur, Deoband, Delhi, and Lahore, but I say, in all sincerity, that they are utterly useless and wholly futile."¹⁴ This approach of Sir Syed brought him in direct confrontation with *Ulama* and reactionary elements of his time.

Thus the Aligarh Movement was vehemently opposed by the conservative and orthodox section of the Muslim community. Sir Syed was branded as *Kafir* (infidel) and *Fatwas* (decrees) were issued against him. It was alleged that Sir Syed was trying to pollute the Muslim mind through English education and he was a British agent. It was also said in the decree that it was a sin "to support his college—may God damn the founder. And if this college has been founded the supporters would be thrown out of the fold of Islam".¹⁵ Thus it was with great difficulty and effort that Sir Syed could establish M.A.O. College and convince Muslims to acquire Western Education. To frustrate the attempts of negative propaganda against M.A.O. College and Aligarh Movement and to avoid confusion about his scheme of education he repeatedly highlighted the importance of Islam in the curricula of the College. In fact, Islamic education and the five times obligatory prayers were compulsory upon all Muslim students studying in the College. It is interesting that Sir Syed established the Department of Theology in the College and the Sunni and Shia theology both were taught which is continuing till today. Aligarh Muslim University Central

Mosque is one of the few mosques in the Indian subcontinent in which Sunnis and Shias both offer prayer.

The efforts of Sir Syed and the importance of M.A.O. College in the life of Indian Muslims are acknowledged by many scholars of repute. S.K. Bhatnagar observes: "The M.A.O. College was both an institution and a movement. It popularized western education amongst the Muslims and initiated an era of brisk activity to extricate the Muslim mind from the outmoded patterns of thought and behavior. As years rolled on it became a nucleus round which all the efforts for adjustment to a changing social order were centered. Established in an atmosphere of mistrust and suspicion, it soon succeeded in finding a place in Muslim confidence. So much so that it is not possible to trace the history of any Muslim activity—political, educational or social—in India during the last one century without a reference to the M.A.O. College."¹⁶ Bhatnagar recollects "Considered in the broad perspective of Islamic history, Sir Syed's educational movement was a unique experiment of its kind." In its valedictory address to him the office bearers of, Anjuman-i-Islamia, Jullundur said:

"There were great educational experiments in Turkey and Spain when Mahomedans were in power, but they were maintained at state expense. In these days we know of no instance among our countrymen, of anyone attempting to establish an institution by the charitable contributions of the public, and this you only have succeeded in doing and for this great deed your name will run down in history and posterity will turn to you a reverential eye."¹⁷

The M.A.O. College was established for the educational advancement of Muslims and its doors were kept open for all communities. We should not overlook the fact that the founders of the College, from the very beginning aimed at achieving the goal of university. On 8th January 1877 when Lord Lytton, the Viceroy and Governor General of India laid the foundation of the College, the College Fund Committee explained the objectives of the College as follows:

"The College of which Your Excellency is about to lay the foundation-stone differs in many important respects from all other educational institutions which this country has seen. There have before been schools and colleges founded and endowed by private individuals. There have been others built by sovereigns and supported by the revenues of the state. But this is the first time in the history of the Mohammadans of India, that a college owes its establishment not to the charity or love of learning of an individual nor to the splendid patronage of a monarch, but *to the combined wishes and the united efforts of a whole community.*

It has its origin causes which the history of this country has never witnessed before. The College was to educate them, (the Muslims) so that they may be able to appreciate these blessings; to dispel those illusory traditions of the past which have hindered our progress; to remove those prejudices which have hitherto exercised a baneful influence on our race; to reconcile oriental learning with western literature and science; to inspire in the dreamy minds of the people of the East the practical energy which belongs to those of the West; to make the Muslims of India worthy and useful subjects of the British Crown, to inspire in them that loyalty which springs, not from servile submission to a foreign rule, but from genuine appreciation of the blessings of good government—these are the objects which the founders of the college have prominently in view”.¹⁸

It was further explained by the exponents of the movement that:

“From the seed which we sow today there may spring up a mighty tree, whose branches, like those of the banyan of the soil, shall in their turn, strike firm roots into the earth, and themselves send forth new and vigorous saplings; that *this college may expand into a university* (italics supplied), whose sons shall go forth throughout the length and breadth of the land to preach the gospel of free enquiry, of large-hearted toleration and of pure morality”.¹⁹

It is clear from the above passage that the founders wanted that the College should develop into a university. After the establishment of the College, the founders continued their efforts to convert the College into a university. The subsequent efforts and events deserve our attention as how the Muslim community led by the companions and followers of Sir Syed collected Rupees three million and deposited the same with the government for getting the status of Aligarh Muslim University by the Act of 1920.

The long title of the 1920 Act points to the fact that the government recognized the efforts of the Muslim community for establishing a university which was to be the centre of Aligarh Movement. The title of the Act was “An Act to establish and incorporate a teaching and residential Muslim University at Aligarh”. The Preamble to the Act refers to dissolution of M.A.O. College Aligarh and the Muslim University Association and transfer of all properties and rights of the said societies and of the Muslim University Foundation Committee to the said University and such property was to be applied to the objects and purposes for which the University was incorporated. The objects and purposes of the University are clear from the various sections of the Act of 1920 and the relevant history of its creation. A perusal of the above mentioned

facts clearly establishes that Aligarh Muslim University was established for the educational advancement of the Muslims.

It is also pertinent to point out that Sir Syed wanted that the degrees of the College should be recognized by the then British government which was necessary for employment of the passed outs. Why Sir Syed and latterly his companions insisted upon the recognition of the degrees of the College/ University by the government of that time can be understood from the fact that they wanted that they should get their due share in the administration of the country which was not possible if their degrees would not be recognized by the government. Noted historian Tara Chand observes about what he calls the 'the unfortunate growth of tension between the Hindus and the Muslims' in the 19th century. He points out:

"The causes of the tension were many—social, political and economic. Some of them affected only the upper classes, some the masses, and the others both; it was competition for the loaves and fishes of government service which brought into clash the interests of the educated Hindus and Muslims. Throughout the first three quarters of the 19th century, the Hindus had manifested greater eagerness in the race for office and more active participation in the administration of the British. English education made greater progress among them, while the Muslims stood aloof, with the result that public employment and success in the independent professions became to a greater degree the possession of the Hindus."²⁰ Tara Chand cites the Government of India's acknowledgement in 1893: "the effect of the exclusion in public and private employment, from which the Muhammadans have suffered, has naturally been to embitter their minds against the Hindus, and reflections on their past state of supremacy contribute to keep this feeling active."²¹

However, on several occasions after independence of India, the purpose and objects of the establishment of the Aligarh Muslim University has been questioned and it's very Muslim character has been challenged. It was indeed shocking for the Muslim community when the Apex Court of the country in Azeez Basha case ruled that the Aligarh Muslim University was not established by the Muslims of India but by the Government of India.²² The judgment led to the noted constitutional expert H.M. Seervai to observe:

"In the present case the Supreme Court has on narrow technical grounds, which are erroneous held that a minority community which has striven for, and obtained, the establishment of a Muslim University and endowed it with considerable property and money had not established that University and that provisions of the Act of 1920 vesting the

supreme government of the University exclusively in Muslims did not vest the administration in Muslims. On the Supreme Court judgment there is nothing to prevent Parliament from converting the Muslim University into a university for foreign students or for backward classes. It is submitted that the decision is clearly wrong and productive of grave public mischief and should be overruled".²³

The Government of India tried to rectify the ill effects of the judgment by enacting the Aligarh Muslim University (Amendment) Act, 1981, which restored the minority character of Aligarh Muslim University. Thus, section 2(1) of the Act declares: "University" means the educational institution of their choice established by the Muslims of India, which originated as the Mohammadan Anglo-Oriental College, Aligarh and which was subsequently incorporated as the Aligarh Muslim University. Section 5(2)(C) of the Act states that the Aligarh Muslim University has been established "to promote especially the educational and cultural advancement of the Muslims of India".

The constitutionality or the validity of the Act was not questioned until 2005 and the Muslim minority was under the impression that the basis of the conclusion arrived at by the Supreme Court in the *Azeez Basha* case having been substituted by the Amendment Act of 1981 loses all force and the law laid down by the Supreme Court in *Azeez Basha* no more holds good.

The subsequent developments however, gave a new twist to the 1981 Act and the minority character of Aligarh Muslim University came under scanner. The Aligarh Muslim University on the recommendation of its competent bodies and in consultation with the Government of India, decided to reserve 50 percent of total seats available for the Post Graduate Medical Courses for Muslims only from the session 2005–2006.²⁴ The decision of the University was challenged in the Allahabad High Court in *Dr. Naresh Agarwal v. Union of India* and others.²⁵ The main contentions of the petitioners were:

- (a) The Aligarh Muslim University which has been declared to be a non-minority institution by the Supreme Court in the case of *Azeez Basha* cannot provide any reservation in respect of Muslim students only. It was also argued that section 2(1) and section (5)(2)(C) of the Aligarh Muslim University (Amendment) Act 1981 have the effect of virtually overruling the judgment of the Hon'ble Supreme Court in the case of *Azeez Basha* which is legally not permissible.
- (b) The Union of India had taken a firm stand before the Supreme Court in the case of *Azeez Basha* that Aligarh Muslim University has not

been established by the Muslim minority but by a Legislative Act, the institution is not entitled to the protection of Article 30 of the Constitution of India. The Union Government cannot now turn around and assert in these writ proceedings that the Aligarh Muslim University has been established by minority community.

- (c) It is beyond the legislative power of the Parliament to overreach/reverse the decision of the Court of law.
- (d) The reservation so made by the Aligarh Muslim University is in violation of Articles 29(2) and (14) of the Constitution.

The Allahabad High Court relied heavily on the Supreme Court judgment in *Azeez Basha*, and observed to the shock of the Muslim minority that the Aligarh Muslim University is not a minority institution and the *Azeez Basha* judgment still holds good.

It is interesting to note that the Supreme Court in the *St. Stephen's College* case had taken into account the structure of the building, the prayer, the religious instructions etc. but the Supreme Court in *Azeez Basha* and Allahabad High Court in Dr. Naresh Agarwal case (*Supra*) ignored the more prominent and visible Muslim character of Aligarh Muslim University in its buildings, its history, its monogram, its degrees and certificates, its Constitution and its life. One hopes that the wrong done by the lower judiciary will be rectified by the Supreme Court subsequently.

The Aligarh Muslim University may retain minority character through political or legislative means also. The Supreme Court in *Azeez Basha* has maintained that "Each University has problems of its own and it seems to us that it is for the legislature to decide what kind of Constitution should be conferred on a particular university established by it". Thus the Parliament of India (if it desires) can pass a new Act or make necessary changes in the present Act and restore the minority character of Aligarh Muslim University in more unequivocal terms.

The Aligarh Muslim University has gone in appeal in the Supreme Court against the judgment of the Allahabad High Court. The appeal has been admitted and the case is pending before the Apex Court. As the hearing in the case is going on in the Supreme Court, there are legal experts and jurists who believe that the minority character of the Aligarh Muslim University will be restored by the Court. There is no doubt about it that if the establishment of the M.A.O. College and its subsequent upgradation as university in 1920 and then conferring to it the Act of 1951 and then the recognition of its historical

character by the Parliament of India through the Aligarh Muslim University (Amendment) Act 1981 is kept in view while giving judgment, the minority character of this great seat of learning will definitely be restored by the Apex Court. In fact, the history of the establishment of Aligarh Muslim University cannot be seen in isolation from the Aligarh Movement. If Aligarh Movement was for the socio-cultural, economic and political regeneration of the Muslims of India then the M.A.O. College/Aligarh Muslim University which is indeed the most visible manifestation of the great movement was established by Muslims of India. It is important to mention in the Supreme Court history of the Aligarh Movement and its link with the M.A.O. College/Aligarh Muslim University to present a holistic picture before the learned judges.

It is hoped that the Apex Court would definitely take into consideration the fact that Aligarh Muslim University has special importance for the Muslims across the globe in general and the Muslims of India in particular. Great poet and philosopher Allama Iqbal while recognizing the importance of the University for Muslims remarked: "Few Institutions in the history of modern Islam have had such deep and far-reaching impact on the intellectual and cultural life of the Muslims as the Mohammadan Anglo-Oriental College founded by Sir Syed Ahmad Khan in 1875 and raised to the status of university in 1920. It heralded a new era of intellectual and cultural renaissance for Muslims not only in India, but the whole of Asia."²⁶

It must be pointed out that the Aligarh Muslim University is not only a university but a movement for inculcating scientific spirit and critical reasoning among Muslims. The University is the most visible manifestation of the great Aligarh Movement and there lies responsibility upon the shoulders of the AMU fraternity to keep the spirit of the great movement alive. If this university loses its Muslim character, it will be a big blow to the movement for educational advancement of the Muslims of India and at the same time any attempt at tempering with its minority character will put a question mark on the secular credentials of our country.

APPRAISAL

Sir Syed has been a victim of communal biases and tendentious interpretations. Filtered through a variety of biased and unbiased interpretations, understood and misunderstood in and out of the contexts and situations, his ideas, views and personality become a matter of controversy and contestation. Rajmohan Gandhi observes: "He is hailed, and assailed, as the founder of Muslim

separatism on the subcontinent. He is blamed, and praised, as a modernizer of Islam."²⁷ There are many who appreciate his, activism, views and ideas for changing the course of history of this subcontinent while there are others who see him as the father of Muslim communalism whose views and ideas altered the political geography of this region by redefining and redrawing the political boundaries.

Sir Syed was the champion of Hindu-Muslim unity. For achieving this unity he advised Muslims to desist from cow-slaughter. He observed "if the giving up of the cow-slaughter will establish amity and friendliness among Hindus and Musalmans, then please do not sacrifice cows which is thousand times better."²⁸ He believed that all Indians whether Hindus or Muslims or any other community for that purpose constitute one nation. In his own words: "Please remember that the Hindu and Muslim are religious terms. In fact, all the inhabitants of India whether Hindu, Muslim or Christian, are by virtue of the fact of their residence one nation...The time is past when merely on the ground of religion the inhabitants of one country could be regarded as members of two nations."²⁹

Sir Syed further said: "We (Hindus and Muslims) should try to become one heart and one soul and act in unison; If united, we can support each other. If not, the effect of one against the other would tend to the destruction and downfall of both."³⁰ He even went to the extent of saying that all people in India by virtue of their inhabitation/residence in India, irrespective of their religious affiliation are Hindu.³¹

He was the firm believer of the Hindu-Muslim unity and consistently maintained that position. He asserted: "We (Hindus and Muslims) eat the same crop, drink water from the same rivers and breathe the same air. As a matter of fact Hindus and Muslims are the two eyes of the beautiful bride that is Hindustan. Weakness of any one of them will spoil the beauty of the bride."³² Similarly, during a public speech in Lahore in 1884, Sir Syed while speaking about the MAO College and the way of life on the campus of the College observed: "...I am happy to be able to say that both brothers receive the same instruction in that college. All the rights at the college which belong to one who calls himself a Mahomedan, belong without any restriction to him also who calls himself a Hindu. There is not the least distinction between the Hindus and the Mahomedans. Only he can claim the reward who earns it by his own exertions. Both Hindus and Muslims are equally entitled to scholarships at the College; both are treated equally as boarders. I regard the Hindus and Mahomedans as my two eyes."³³ Again in the present circumstances, his conviction and sincere

efforts for the Hindu-Muslim unity in the Indian subcontinent are increasingly becoming significantly relevant.

CONCLUSION

Sir Syed is indeed one of the makers of modern India. He is great despite being the fact that he never headed a large army, did not fight a heroic battle and achieved victory. Yet his fight against orthodoxy and conservative outlook, his constant endeavors for ameliorating a community which was destroyed completely facing the wrath of the mightiest power on earth of that time, and his achievements as a social reformer and educationist, his success as the founder of 'the first modernist institution in Islam' make him immortal in the pages of history. Tara Chand observes: "Syed Ahmad Khan had inaugurated a revolution in Muslim thought. Of no less importance, in fact, of greater consequence, was his endeavour to reform the Muslims individually and collectively. He wanted to provide institutional foundations for his religious ideas and, therefore, he prepared a scheme of Muslim education which would satisfy their religious, cultural and material needs."³⁴

Sir Syed was the pioneer of the movement for the Inter-Faith understanding. He championed the noble cause of Hindu-Muslim unity and tried to remove misunderstandings between the Christians and Muslims. For this purpose he wrote the commentary of Bible with the positive intention of bridging the gap between the two communities. Perhaps, it was the first sincere attempt by a Muslim to interpret Bible for a positive purpose.

In today's world the agitational politics and violent protests are becoming order of the day. Provoked or unprovoked, people across the globe are showing the signs of growing intolerance. The mobilization along the issues of religion and identity is more particularly threatening harmony and spirit of peaceful co-existence between the communities. One is reminded here the way Sir Syed adopted for registering his protest. It is important to mention that when William Muir wrote the book (*The Life of Mohamet*) maligning the holy prophet, Sir Syed was deeply pained but he did not express his outrage by doing things like organizing protests, demonstrations, petitioning, or calling for his head. He rather travelled to England and wrote the book *Khutabat-e-Ahmadia* which is a befitting reply to the baseless charges leveled against the prophet of Islam. He called upon Muslims to shun violence and become the true representative of Islam.

Although it is difficult to erect a wall of demarcation between religion and politics, Sir Syed successfully did it by avoiding and denouncing a political

approach to religion. He was opposed to politicized religiosity and religious fanaticism of all communities. He assiduously advocated and worked for inter-communal harmony at a time when it was in great peril. He unequivocally denounced the violent and agitational means for achieving political and religious objectives. His opposition to Jamaluddin Afghani's movement and agitational politics of his countrymen is a testimony to the fact.

Sir Syed's personality and his Aligarh Movement have become more relevant in our time. In this era of growing intolerance, religious extremism, Islamophobia and revivalist tendencies, his ideas, views and strategies can become the guiding principles for all of us. Since the suspension of ideological conflict between the two hostile blocs of the Cold War period, we find ourselves in the midst of cultural and religious conflicts or what Huntington would like us to believe 'the clash of civilizations'.³⁵ The rise of highly motivated religious extremist forces across the globe is threatening peace and order in the world. Under these circumstances, scientific outlook and temper is to be reasserted against the forces of extremism, orthodoxy and conservatism. Sir Syed's exemplary efforts in this direction are worth re-calling and appreciating in this time of crisis.

Sir Syed breathed his last on 27 March 1898. But the movement he had started makes him immortal. The sprawling and vibrant campus of Aligarh Muslim University, the custodian of the Aligarh Movement, with thousands of its *alumni* and *alumnae* spread across the globe continue to uphold the spirit of the gospel of free inquiry, of large hearted tolerance and of pure morality as tributes to their founder and the *alma mater*. Noted historian Tara Chand recognizes the remarkable efforts and services rendered by the great organic leader who tirelessly worked for the uplift of his community by saying that "Syed Ahmad Khan lived a long and strenuous life which was singularly devoted to the cause of the Muslims."³⁶

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